Proxemics

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Proxemics

by Necronon

Summary

Hannibal enthusiastically explores Will's capacity for varying intimacies, and Will exceeds his expectations.

Notes

Shout-out to Seluvia for their patience, insight, and support. Con-crit always welcome. All mistakes are my own.

See the end of the work for more notes

Boule

It started with the acceptance of an invitation.

Will was on his way out when Hannibal, true to form, rose and followed him to the door to bid him one of those practiced farewells Will had come to expect at the close of their sessions together. Instead of the doorknob, however, Hannibal's hand found Will's shoulder.

"Will."

Will looked at Hannibal's starched collar. Then, in increments but with increasing ease, to his inquisitive eyes. Just a cursory glance, *I'm listening*, before clearing his throat and tugging on his coat, sleeves and shoulders still damp. Rain, it was always raining.

"How about a nightcap before you leave Baltimore?"

Not one of Hannibal's infamous banquets. Something about the question, about the drop in decibel of Hannibal's voice, suggested more intimacy than existential debate over a Russian entree Will couldn't pronounce. Not that Will minded the latter.

"At your house?" Will asked, dubious. And, admittedly, a bit curious, but he wasn't a cat. He could afford the curiosity.

"Yes."

"For..."

"Drinks, if you'll have them."

"Cigars, brandy, and politics?"

"Not exactly. Certainly nothing that couldn't be improved upon with good company."

"I don't know," Will said. *I'm not good company.* "It's a long drive back."

"You could sleep in the guest room, if needed."

"No, that's—the dogs."

"Ah." A crafty grin drew Hannibal's lips into a tight line. "I have a little something for them as well."

"You—" A deep crease formed between Will's brows as Hannibal's meaning became clear. "*More* sausage? You're going to spoil them."

"I'm only guilty of aiding and abetting what you've already started. Are you going to decline?"

Will sighed and shook his head. “You know I’m not, Doctor. Winston would never forgive me.”

“He would be very disappointed. Do you know the way?”

“To—oh.” Will pawed at the growth along his jaw as he retraced the route in his head. “Yeah." Hannibal continued to stare at him. "What, now?”

“Give me just a moment. I’ll walk you out.”

Will didn't know why the good doctor bothered. Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth, he supposed.

“That sounds waaay too complicated,” Will drawled as he reclined against the island and watched Hannibal busy himself in the kitchen.

The ice in his whiskey snapped and settled, a sharp sound that contrasted the muted opera drifting from the study. Between the faint buzz he was nursing and their quiet conversation, Will felt uncharacteristically serene. He watched Hannibal as they chatted, how animated the man became the moment he stepped into the kitchen. Hannibal moved with the precision and confidence born of repetition, fetching supplies from cupboards and drawers, all sharp fingers and twisting wrists. Will marveled at his hands. There was a story there, written into the lines across their backs and the inexplicable callouses that might of been the product of striking keys or guiding a pencil. A knife.

“You enjoy dinners with me. My arrangements.” Hannibal glanced expectantly at him.

“Well, yeah.” *Who wouldn’t?* "That's different." Will idly swirled his whiskey as he watched Hannibal measure out flour, removing the excess with a meticulousness that Will had never attributed to baking.

“Is it?” Hannibal asked, glancing over the rim of a mixing bowl as he bent to read the scale. “I don’t adhere strictly to *kaiseki*, but certainly you can agree with its incorporation. After all, you’ve extraordinary attention to detail; your compliments do not go unaccounted for.

“And,” Hannibal continued, resealing the container of flour and storing it back in the pantry, “the meat is almost always local. Provenance is important, and a quality cut of meat is the perfect centerpiece, don’t you think? I’ll only abide second-to-none presentation for guests at my table. I would never serve anyone anything I wouldn’t eat, myself.”

“It’s always very pretty,” Will agreed. He wore a surly smirk, but the honesty in his voice softened it. “You know, I think I put on a few pounds.”

“I’ve noticed,” Hannibal said with a grave expression. Then made as if to pinch the paunch in question as he pulled out a drawer by Will’s hip.

Will's eyes bulged as he dodged the hand and floundered backwards, too startled to take any significant offense. Hannibal's eyes flashed with mischief and an appalling overabundance of charm, and Will wondered why he was spending his evening with a—what had Zeller said? *Prickly little professor.* Which was ridiculous, because he could be nice. Tall, too, if he stood up straight.

"Now if only we could get you a good night's rest."

"You weren't supposed to agree. I can't fit into my favorite jeans anymore—the ones you always look at like you're going to be nauseous. It's a conspiracy, isn't it? You've orchestrated it all. Waging war on my wardrobe."

"The frayed hems," Hannibal recalled with a hitched lip, giving Will a disapproving once-over before gently offering: "I know a boutique in the Baltimore downtown area that—"

"Do I look like the kind of guy that goes anywhere near boutiques?" Will gestured up and down himself, in case his point wasn't already obvious.

Hannibal paused, tracking the motion, then said, "You could be."

Will opened his mouth. Then shut it. What was that supposed to mean?

Hannibal straightened and turned to the sink to rinse his hands, drying them with a tea towel that he draped back over his shoulder as he faced Will again.

"That aside, cooking for you is an especially gratifying experience. You're the only guest that employs *wabi-sabi*."

"Wobbly what? I don't even know what that is."

There was a chastising (but slightly amused) glance from Hannibal, eyes crinkling fondly as he elaborated.

"Appreciating and accepting transience and imperfection." Hannibal reached forward to set a hand against Will's jaw, palm infused with the scent of damp cotton and flour. It was comforting, like Will had turned his face into a pile of clean linen right out of the drier. "Having you here, watching you as you eat."

"Don't tell me you have an oral fixation, Doctor Lecter."

A beat passed during which Hannibal only surveyed him, and Will felt increasingly scandalous. Hannibal's hand drifted up his cheek to pull one of Will's curls straight before letting it bounce back into place against his temple. It was a peculiar thing to do, but Will let it slide. Hannibal was a peculiar guy. Then Hannibal exhaled serenely, as if extricating himself from deep thought, and held Will by the nape of his neck like he so often did when they discussed matters of the heart. Will figured it was Hannibal's way of saying, *Between you and me...*

"I enjoy it because you allow me to transform you through taste, texture, and color. A private sounding board for my gastronomical inquisitions. Every change in your expression is like a

note of music sounded from a composition.”

Will barked out a sardonic laugh. “Your composition.”

“Yes.”

“And I get a free meal out of it.”

“The only price of admission is your company.”

“Kinda lowballing it, aren’t you?”

“Not in the least. You keep so little company. I’m honored to be that company.”

“Well, You’re persistent. And I can always eat.”

“We’re not eating now.”

“Then what are we doing?” Will asked, glancing above his glasses at him.

“We are,” Hannibal said, carefully plucking the frames from Will's face so that the view was unobstructed, “enjoying the benefits of friendship. There must be something you find interesting about me after all.”

Will hadn’t really thought about it before. He’d gone from *that hermit with all those dogs* to having opulent dinners every other night, and here he was again, not for the first time, spending several more hours with his pseudo-therapist. Hell, Hannibal was probably his closest friend, and Will felt lousy for re-purposing him that way. He felt like an old wart beside a man so far out of his league, and Will wondered if he was the exception for Hannibal in some way too, and not just another insignificant mark on a busy man’s social calendar. Come to think of it, Will was only over a lot because Hannibal *had* him over a lot. Two-way street. Will wondered why.

Just feels like I should be doing more. Will realized he’d said it aloud when he saw Hannibal’s eyes widen a degree above one of those rare smiles that flashed a bit of tooth: one of those smiles that reminded Will what sincerity looked like.

“I meant—it just feels like I’m mooching. Can I at least help with anything?”

Hannibal quirked a brow and glanced to the flour, salt, water, and yeast all neatly measured out behind him. “If you wish. Finish your drink and wash your hands. Everyone should have at least one basic bread recipe in their tool belt.”

“I’ll file it in between 'blood splatter' and 'corpse decomposition.' "

“Careful there is no spillover.”

“I don’t know," Will said. "Some recipes call for blood.”

Hannibal shot Will a look that perplexed him, but Will didn't ask. It was probably a weird thing to say. He was always doing that, saying the wrong things. Saying *too much.*

A rustic French boule, Hannibal explained as he walked Will through the simple process and, after mixing the water and flour and allowing for a brief autolyse, took to the space immediately behind him to observe Will's progress as the salt and yeast were added. Hannibal had, of course, already finished shaping his own dough: the two rounded loaves rising in proofing baskets adjacent. Will had watched Hannibal work the dough in a slightly inebriated trance, painfully aware of his comparatively ham-handed approach. He could just imagine Hannibal's sour face as he peered over his shoulder.

"I think you're killing it," Hannibal murmured by his ear.

Will didn't quite turn round, his left shoulder knocking against Hannibal's collar as he angled his head just enough to see Hannibal's mouth pulling into a tight smile in his periphery as they shared whiskey and wine-scented breath in the scant few inches between them. Hannibal's eyes flitted up and down Will's face, from his mouth to his hairline, and back again. Will closed his eyes, inadvertently squeezing the springy dough between his fingers as Hannibal set the bridge of his nose against Will's shoulder and drew a very deep, very obvious breath. Felt the curls at his nape tremor in the successive exhalation, hot breath coasting into the collar of Will's shirt and along his shoulder.

Hannibal was close. Close enough that Will was sure he could feel his full-body shudder.

Will licked his lips and swallowed. Hooked his fingers into the abused dough that was undoubtedly a lost cause at this point, and held his breath.

"You're very sensitive to the proximity of others," Hannibal told him, demonstrating the point by brushing a hand down Will's arm, eliciting a flinch.

"Physical touch is a lot more... distracting than eye contact."

"Not unpleasant?"

"Not always."

"And this?" Hannibal continued to rub up and down his arm.

"I—I don't know."

"Will," Hannibal said, a little more imperiously. "Look at me."

"What about the—"

"Look at me."

Will hesitantly turned, finding Hannibal even closer than he'd suspected. Will's waist was against the counter, making it impossible to retreat. If he'd wanted to. He should have wanted to.

“You’ve a habit of feeling so terribly for feeling so good. You’re always denying yourself.”

“Not exactly unmerited, considering the company I keep upstairs.”

“It’s only you and I, now,” Hannibal assured him, cupping his jaw with a broad, warm palm that Will couldn’t help tipping his cheek into.

It felt good. Hannibal’s presence was a steady stream that filled up the room and his mind, those hollow places in the corners of his subconscious that whispered. Sometimes shouted. Everything was muted now as Hannibal submerged him, nothing too sharp or loud or bright. He felt like he did when he was fishing or tying flies, except for the undercurrent of *something else* that niggled at him.

Will’s hands were still covered in wet flour. They hovered beside him as he pushed up on his toes and brought their mouths together. It was all wrong, teeth bruising and poorly aimed, sloppy, but Hannibal obliged him. Obliged him with a tongue in his mouth and sharp teeth. Hot hands on his neck and waist. Will wasn’t sure it was kissing so much as mutually biting; he was startled by Hannibal’s abrupt hunger. How long had Hannibal wanted this? Somehow, Will knew the night had been leading up to it. He’d had a knot in his stomach since he’d pulled into the drive. The air between them had felt charged, crackling when they drew too close to one another.

Maybe it had been leading up to this since Will had plopped down, disgruntled, beside him in Jack’s office.

Hannibal made a noise, a subhuman kind of growl that he fed right into Will’s mouth and down his throat, settling heavy in his gut. An excruciatingly erotic noise that Will had never dared imagine, at least not sober, coming from the good doctor. Like Hannibal had been restraining himself and was all pent up—not for sex, but for Will. Will could barely comprehend it.

He broke the kiss with an inadvertently obscene, wet *pop* as he jerked his head to the side and gasped, eyes screwed shut again. Warm pressure skated along his jaw, then fingers twining through the hair. His face was surface-of-the-damned-sun hot, and he had no idea what to say or do or—

“I’ve embarrassed you,” Hannibal said.

Will wanted to knock him on his ass, or at least tell him he ought to knock him on his ass, but all he managed was an indignant hiss as he exhaled and bit down on his lip—between *his* teeth now instead of Hannibal’s, and oh, he’d really liked it. He’d fucking loved it. Distantly, he was aware of the taste of blood.

“Very good, Will,” Hannibal said, swabbing a trickle of it from his mouth. Hannibal's lip was split. “You should take the things you want. No one will hand them to you.”

“I hurt you.”

Hannibal reached and moved the pad of his thumb across Will's swollen mouth, exhibiting it after. It was red. "And I hurt you."

"Oh."

Madam Butterfly had stopped her crooning in the study, the kitchen loud with their shared breathing. Hannibal placed a single, chaste kiss on his brow.

"Place your dough in the proofing basket."

"It's not going to be very pretty."

"I beg to differ. Beautiful by association."

Will grimaced, feeling his face heat again, and did as he was told, carefully depositing his crude dough into the remaining proofing basket—one of four total, and one of two that contained Will's uglier creations—to rise. He did so slowly, a futile attempt to avoid the inevitable interaction to come, and as he pivoted to face Hannibal, he wondered if Hannibal might just drop it altogether. It would be for the best. Whatever *it* was. He liked his time with Hannibal. He liked Hannibal, and the last thing he needed was another complicated relationship. Not when he had so few of them, none really, and especially not when he enjoyed such a precious ease around Hannibal that he had yet to find elsewhere.

Just as Will resigned himself, solemn and braced against the counter, Hannibal turned and crowded up against him, slotting their bodies and mouths back together.

Will clutched at Hannibal's burgundy button-down, now burgundy and speckled white, as Hannibal set his mouth against his and said, "Kiss me, Will."

"Why?" Will rasped, anchoring a forearm between them.

"Because you still want to."

"Do I?" Will jerked his head defiantly out of a searching hand, only succeeding in giving Hannibal the column of his neck where Hannibal said in response and with a deal more urgency, "*Yes*."

Will turned, found Hannibal's face with dusty hands, and guided their mouths back together. He wanted to, he did. God, did he want to, and as he did, Hannibal's plush mouth yielded immediately to him. Not frenzied, like before, but thorough and searching. A tempered hunger. Behind him, the rustic loaves rose as assuredly as Will was against Hannibal's rocking thigh, and Christ, he was kissing his pseudo-therapist in the middle of the night in his kitchen, and this really wasn't what Will should have been doing. Doing it, or liking it, not so much. And Hannibal shouldn't have been so damn good at it, so exactly—

"Oh," he said into Hannibal's mouth, between the slide of their tongues and aching lips. "Can I—can we—"

No. No, wait. What was he asking? He wasn't. Not that.

Will wrestled an arm back between them to intercept himself more so than Hannibal. Hannibal allowed it, but Will didn't miss the glint of something ravenous in the man's dark eyes. The overhead light, turned bright for what should have been a bit of platonic bread-making, etched sharp pinpoints across them.

Will had to look away. "I can't do this."

"Can't," Hannibal said, a little hoarse, "or won't?"

"Won't. Can't." Will sighed and squirmed out from between the counter and Hannibal's looming figure. "Both. Is this a game for you? Something for my patient journal?"

Will knew it wasn't, but he still said it. Wanted to ask how many *private cooking lessons* he'd given before Will had come along. Will was always fucking up the only good things in his life, and here he was again. He felt sick.

Hannibal's eyes tracked him, expression ineffable, and the only evidence that they'd engaged in more than polite conversation the awry nest that had been made of Hannibal's neat coif by Will's scrabbling fingers. Will hadn't managed to keep his hands to himself after all, and he hoped it wouldn't be too difficult for Hannibal to get the flour out of his hair. Will tried not to look at him, tried not to like how good he looked like that.

"Is it so difficult to imagine that someone is genuinely attracted to you. That you can have intimacy without consequence?"

"Yeah," Will said, "it is. You barely know who I am. I barely know who I am some days. I'm not good to be around, and even worse to be with. I wouldn't wish myself on anyone."

"I think I am in a position to know you quite well. And it so happens that I find you agreeable."

"Agreeable," Will echoed, affronted. "The weather is agreeable, Doctor."

"It's storming."

"You know what I mean."

"Forgive me," Hannibal said after a long-suffering sigh, absently dusting the flour off the front of his shirt. "I was being mild for decency's sake, but platitudes have no place between us. Let me rephrase and say, by agreeable, I meant that I've recently conceived the idea of your being in my bed as well as at my table." Hannibal bent his head and licked, pressing his humid mouth to Will's naked ear. "You want for more than stimulating debate, and I might provide that for you."

Will gaped at him, eyes wide. "Wha—what? I'm sorry, but what are you saying?"

"We entertain a rare breed of honesty between us, and I won't forfeit that now. I would hardly have put you in this position if you hadn't wanted it yourself."

"You can't know what I want."

“Not impartially. But I can help you understand it for yourself. You kissed *me*, Will.”

“You—” Will started. “*Shit.*”

“If it matters, it has been inconvenient for me as well. Evaluating your aptitude for field work was a feat while your assets were squeezed into denim a few feet in front of me. I’m not insusceptible to beauty or desire. Quite the opposite.”

Will’s jaw dropped.

“I thought you *hated* those jeans.”

“I did. Just not for the reasons you’d suspected.”

“Oh my God.”

“I have a proposition for you, but let's table this for now. How about another drink?”

“Now that is *exactly* what I want.”

Eiswein

The weather had cleared long enough to trick him into spending the day riverside. He'd been itching to try out his recent flies, even though several were palmered poorly or with the wrong color of herl. He left the ones that weren't serviceable in a fly box where he kept his sentimental pieces. He didn't remember finishing most of them. Was he tying flies in his sleep, too? If he was, they weren't half bad, considering. Not good, but the kind of quality he'd expect from a novice that'd done their research but hadn't been hands-on, finished product littered with little flaws only noticeable to a seasoned angler.

He could really use the fresh air besides. After he'd...

No. He wasn't going to think about it. Not yet. There would be plenty of time to address it later that evening in the proper setting.

Will herded the dogs into the bed of the truck, an old beater he kept for just that purpose, and tossed his tackle onto the ratty bench seat beside him. There were several holes, chewed through or eviscerated by claws, through which yellowed foam bulged; another hole in the metal chassis between the seats showed the road racing past beneath, a dark blur that pulsed white as he changed lanes. The gleaming poles secured into a Cabela's rod rack mounted on the bumper were worth more than the vehicle.

The forest buzzed with activity, stirred awake by the squall the night before, and for a few hours, everything was right in the world. Max and Harley charged the water and paddled excited circles around each other. Buster crouched on the bank and fussed at the carp fingerlings he could see but had no hope of actually catching. It was idyllic, and against Alana's undoubtedly better judgment, he imagined Abigail had come along with him. It was easy to think of her, beside him, familiar company and a sharp mind. The happy anticipation of being able to feel pride bubbled up in him. He hadn't given her the kit, not yet, but he could imagine it so clearly.

And Hannibal, on the bank preening over a picnic basket.

Will laughed abruptly, a loud bark that dwindled into a quivering sigh. Winston, who'd been prowling up and down the river like a furry guard, perked his ears.

He wanted to see him. He tried so hard not to, but the memory of able hands and a soft mouth kept surfacing in his thoughts. Will could have spent another good three hours casting—even though he had little to show for it—but he couldn't bring himself to cancel on the good doctor. *Hannibal.* It would have been easy to blame his early retirement on the overcast horizon and the encroaching storm.

Will waded out of the stream and whistled for his dogs, fully aware of the beating of his heart and the breath in his lungs as he loaded the truck and headed home. He'd have just enough time to get the dogs settled and square away his things before leaving for Baltimore to hear Hannibal's proposal out.

Will didn't often get the urge to stomp his heel and shout with all the outrage of a well-to-do gentleman that had just had his propriety encroached upon, but he was as close to it as he was ever going to get, bar time travel and a Rococo wig. No, he was all quiet insult and muddy Timberlands with stained laces. Hannibal had given his shoes a cursory glance and bent closer to appraise him with a sniff. Will knew his hands probably still smelled like the lonely bass he'd caught and tossed back for being too young. No amount of lemon was going to fool Hannibal's nose.

Presently, they sat across from one another, Hannibal patiently waiting as Will digested what had just been asked of him.

He could barely think over all that check tweed.

"So you're telling me," Will finally ventured, reducing his field of vision to the baby-blue chenille pocket square that was nestled in Hannibal's coat, "that a little fondling can cure my insomnia and migraines?"

Hannibal was sitting with his legs crossed and hands clasped in his lap, looking every bit as serene as Will wasn't. They might have been discussing the weather—which was presently cats-and-dogs awful—or stocks.

"You're attempting to turn yourself against the idea before you've even considered it." Hannibal's eyes thinned, pocketed by shadow as he reclined and continued to study Will. "I'd prefer you didn't paraphrase."

"And I'd prefer not to mince words, Doctor. Rare breed of honesty, remember?"

"One can be honest without being coarse. But as you wish," Hannibal acceded, riding a gentle segue right around Will's petulance, and God, now Will felt like a child. "Admittedly, a familiar environment is better, but my home offers less distraction. And there is the issue of your sink's plumbing being strewed about the kitchen."

"Because this is about my plumbing."

Will grimaced and let his his unfocused gaze fall on the overcast windows adjacent. A steady torrent of rain convolved the view of the Baltimore cityscape, furthering the sense that the office was divorced from the world in some way—a secret place inundated with conversation Will couldn't imagine having anywhere else. With anyone else.

When he finally snapped out of his thoughts, it was to the pervasive scrutiny of Hannibal's patient stare.

Will sighed.

"Don't get me wrong. It sounds better than hot wax and needles."

“Acupuncture has been very effective in some cases.”

“Right.”

“Will, you may not have noticed, but you permit my hands quite a lot of liberty with your body already. Relatively speaking.”

Hannibal started to recount instances, to Will’s increasing mortification, that reinforced his point, but Will stopped him. “Look, I get it. It’s not exactly subtle.” *Not anymore.*

Will suddenly thought of his dogs, a sea of wet noses and wagging tails crowding his legs. Winston butting his big head into an available palm, demanding affection.

Petting. That was the truth Hannibal had narrowly veiled with verbiage, but Will had read between the lines. He was always reading between the lines, and Hannibal was always drawing them. There were probably pages of notes in his patient journal that said things like, *Anxiety significantly ameliorated by copious petting.* Maybe even a few sketches of Will’s profile next to schnauzer. A hasty rendering of a capable hand threaded through haphazard curls.

Hannibal cleared his throat and uncrossed his legs. “When words cannot reach you, an amiable hand might. I was afraid of undoing such an effectual development by drawing attention to it.”

Well, it sure as hell was developed now.

“You will at least humor me,” Hannibal added with a curt smile, and Will wasn’t sure if he was telling or asking.

“Fine, I’ll play,” Will said. “If this intimacy of yours means I can stop soaking the sheets”—Will winced at his word choice—”then I’ll do it. A bit unorthodox though. Are you often so heuristic, Doctor?”

“Whenever possible.” Hannibal leaned forward, something impish in his expression. “You and I exist outside of an official capacity. A mind as exquisite as yours can hardly be quantified by the orthodox.”

“Jack has sent me to a deviant.” Will groaned with mock exasperation, even as a creeping grin pulled at his mouth.

Hannibal pursed his lips and made a shushing noise. “I won’t have my unofficial patient spoiling my reputation.”

Will’s grin finally broke and he laughed. “God forbid anyone find out that you’re anything other than a pocket square with a PhD.”

“Several. Of both.”

“Oh my God.” Will rolled his eyes.

Hannibal smiled, the sharp tips of bright, crooked teeth flashing between two Bordeaux lips. Hannibal appeared abruptly wolfish. Frightening. But that couldn't be right. Hannibal was harmless. Wasn't he? Will was suddenly overcome with a vision of something other. Something more suited to his nightmares than his waking hours. Something—

"Just me," Hannibal unwittingly interjected, throaty vowels rounding his mouth and underscoring the rain's muted red noise.

The moment was gone.

Will was recovering from a lingering pang of inexplicable foreboding when Hannibal had the audacity to retrieve his phone from inside his coat to make a show of checking his schedule.

Don't want to seem too eager .

"I will be available as soon as..." Hannibal quirked a brow and looked over at him. "Tomorrow."

Scratch that.

"Tomorrow, but that's—" Will wracked his brain for a decent objection, but came up empty. Accustomed to Hannibal's peculiar ability to miraculously intuit and transcribe his bat-shit wool-gathering, Will opted for a withering look that drew deep lines across his forehead.

I'm sure you understand, the look said, as if anyone possibly could—except Hannibal often *did,* and even now he was parsing Will's apprehension.

"Tomorrow, a week, a month. Does it matter?" Hannibal asked, adjusting his head almost imperceptibly so that the slate-colored panes of glass superimposed themselves over his dark, deep-set eyes.

Will felt pierced by those vibrant pinpricks of light. His next breath came a bit shallow and uneven.

Hannibal's face softened when Will reflexively broke their eye contact. "Is it that you anticipate disappointment? Or, perhaps, it's something to do with what happened between us the other night."

Will puffed out a single, derisive laugh and bent forward so that he could scrub his hands over his face, humiliated and effectively hiding his flush.

"You've alienated yourself, Will. What a shame; you have such a rare gift, one that enables you to intimately experience the world around you, yet you are repeatedly exposed to the worst in it."

"I'm fine," Will grumbled through his fingers. "Why you? Why are you doing this?"

"I wonder." Hannibal fixed him with a curious look. "Perhaps because I am learned of both the mind and body, and that makes me sensitive to you. Perhaps I see a kindred spirit. Or perhaps it is something else altogether. Either way, our friendship—"

Will glanced up, but didn't correct him.

"—is unconditional."

"No strings attached, huh?"

"No strings."

Will didn't really believe that.

"But isn't it kind of strange? I mean, letting me..." Will sighed and tossed one of his hands in Hannibal's general direction. "*Use* you."

"I'll be using you in turn, in my own way—I enjoy my work enormously. You've also proven indispensable in the kitchen."

"Work... You mean therapy. And don't lie—you transform into a mother hen when I start dicing anything."

"Not exactly. It's hardly different than an artist plying his trade. Transforming medium."

"Going to make art out of me? Good luck. Can't polish a turd."

Will savored Hannibal's uncharacteristic moment of censure—little more than a tightening of his jaw—before Hannibal firmly said, "Self-deprecation is unbecoming, Will. I see marvelous potential in you."

"You have a really backward way of complimenting people."

"It remains that you might find some relief through alternate methods. Your mind could benefit from a little quiet."

"Sounds kind of like you're going to be doing more than..."

"Than what? Touching you? Feeding you? You underestimate the pleasure I derive as host, though I would be remiss not to ask you to decide what you are and are not comfortable with beforehand. Are you afraid you will kiss me again?"

"That's not—" Will set his elbows on his knees, at a loss. *You weren't exactly recalcitrant either, Doctor.* "Nothing... weird."

"Weird?"

"Yes, *weird.* I really don't know how I feel about this. I'm half expecting you to pull out a voodoo doll next."

Hannibal disregarded him, rising from his chair and buttoning his coat. There was an audible exhale through that noble nose as Hannibal's mouth openened prematurely around his next thought. A beat passed, then: "All that matters is that you enjoy our time together, no matter

how we utilize it. It is good to have a friend—someone to trust implicitly. Someone with whom you can be yourself."

"Yeah, I guess." Will rose in tandem. His hour was up, though Hannibal didn't seem concerned. Never asked him to leave. He'd canceled another appointment in Will's stead once already. "Haven't ran off yet. Even if my trust only extends so far as tomorrow, in that predetermined space and time."

"I only ask that you try."

"I will. Try." Will straightened and pushed his glasses up his nose. "I can."

"I believe that you will. It's a date, then."

Will glowered at him but shook his hand regardless, Hannibal's fingers lingering overly long around his.

Hannibal suspected Will of changing his mind when 7:30 came around. The young man was running late, and the dish he'd prepared explicitly for their evening was in real danger of drying out.

Then, as Hannibal bent to check the oven and its elaborate contents, there was a halting knock at the front door.

Hannibal wasted no time in greeting his guest, savoring the almost shy glance as Will stepped inside.

"Good evening, Will"

"Hannibal."

Hannibal smiled at the use of his first name but didn't comment.

Will had worn a gently-used pair of sable corduroy pants whose waistband was a little too taut. Hannibal admired the subtle pouch—his handiwork—where a frayed plaid button-down was tucked in above a brown, braided-leather belt with a silver buckle. Will's wide hips, not feminine but substantial for a man, cut an enticing figure in the snug trousers, and Hannibal was careful to monitor his roaming eyes. The soft fabric smelled like a few years in a drawer, damp pressboard, and artificial rain from an aerosol can.

It was a casual but noticeably less tired than Will's usual ensemble, and Hannibal would be remiss not to recognize Will had made some small attempt to spruce up; something Will, prestigious professor and now consultant for the FBI, barely bothered to otherwise do. Even Will's unruly curls had been combed aside, though already they were sneaking back into a fringe across his forehead. Hannibal wanted to run his hands through them, up and down

Will's sides, feeling out the figure the man had tried to cut for him, whether Will realized it or not.

Hannibal was delighted.

Oh, Will. His oblivious, beautiful boy, smelling only a little like cheap aftershave and mothballs. So unobtrusive.

So disguised. Veiled.

Beautiful, *dangerous* boy.

"Please, come this way," Hannibal said, offering Will his arm.

Who—remembering why he'd come—begrudgingly accepted it.

Struffoli

Because Hannibal's professional hauteur was due for a modest knocking-down-a-peg, Will pulled onto Hannibal's manicured drive only a little late. Hannibal was there to greet him at the door in a second, comparatively punctual. If he was disappointed in Will's fashionably late arrival, he didn't show it.

Will crossed the threshold, the proverbial point of no return, with his shoulders stooped and brow knit. The door closed behind him with poignant gravitas as Hannibal took his soggy coat with the most innocuous of smiles and hung it neatly in the hall closet.

"Good evening, Will."

"Hannibal." Will managed a fleeting glance.

Hannibal was garbed in what Will figured was his idea of casual attire, charcoal slacks paired with a rusty button-down that accentuated the amber striations in his eyes until they appeared almost red in the dim lamplight. The sleeves were rolled up to the elbows, and an apron was tied around his waist. The usual tea towel had been tossed over one of his broad shoulders, as crisp and clean as the shirt beneath.

Hannibal looked longer and leaner than he did in his three-piece suits. Not a single garment bordered on kaleidoscopic. Evening Hannibal was a significant departure from the professional counterpart Will had observed among friends. Or was it less to do with the time than the company? Where Hannibal seemed pragmatic and circumspect on the clock, here he was fervid, more inclined to touch and speak his mind as he stepped out of the role of prudent observer. Hannibal moved with a fluidity that was usually hampered by too many layers of wool, and with his hair loose across his brow Will realized the man was startlingly handsome.

And not just objectively.

"Please, this way," Hannibal said, offering his arm.

Will started to laugh but broke off into silence when Hannibal remained perfectly serious, arm crooked.

Right. That.

"Smells good," Will mumbled, taking the offered limb stiffly."Guess you were pretty sure I'd show, huh?"

"Reasonably," Hannibal said, guiding him towards the study that Will had visited enough to have a Usual Spot. "Dinner will be a little something different, tonight. I'll only be a moment."

Will watched skeptically as Hannibal disappeared around the corner and down the hall. He'd noticed when they'd passed the dining room that no places had been set, but whatever

different was, it smelled fantastic. The mysterious scent wafting from the kitchen was saccharine and pervasive, something Will associated more with a bakery than the traditionally savory smell of Hannibal's elaborate dinners. Underscored by the much more heady aroma of the fire nearby, it was having a sedating effect on Will.

Will studied the innumerable and peculiar (and probably very expensive) baubles that Hannibal had arranged on shelves or mounted on the wall. Books—Will was surprised to find Miller slotted in by Tolstoy—pottery; Renaissance art; what appeared to be a set of precolonial stone effigies wearing large, radial headdresses; and an antique globe that, judging by its countries and their divisions or lack thereof, had been inscribed well before WWI.

"I have been fortunate to see much of the world and acquire many generous friends along the way," Hannibal said as he approached, balancing a gilt-rimmed, bone china plate topped with —

My *God*, what was that? The elaborate confection looked like a pyramid of diminutive doughnut holes, drizzled in some kind of sauce and dappled with what might have been nutmeg or cinnamon.

"That looks like it belongs in a museum, not on a plate." *Or on the mantle.*

"An admittedly indulgent interpretation of s*truffoli.* Traditional orange rind and spices, but ambitiously stuffed with a nutty *crème pâtissière."*

"You," Will said, staring at the pyramid of food, "made me doughnut holes...? Stuffed doughnut holes?"

Will saw more than heard Hannibal's long sigh, his chest rising and falling as he glanced at Will from beneath his brow. It was a look of chastisement.

It was then that Will noticed the large brocade chair—his Usual Spot adjacent the fireplace—had been relocated a bit farther back and was now joined with one of the Vimercati end tables. Will surveyed the makeshift dining area as Hannibal set the doughnut sculpture—because it was a damn doughnut sculpture—atop it, along with an accompanying wine glass which Hannibal was presently preparing to fill from a bottle tucked beneath his arm.

"Forks? Spoons?" Will watched Hannibal's arm as he twisted in the corkscrew, flinching when the cork popped.

"No," Hannibal said absently, tipping the slender bottle to the rim of the glass. "A Vidal ice wine, the product of an unusually early German winter. An unintended but delightful vintage."

Will loitered by the fire where a poorly cured log hissed in the heat, tamping down on the urge to pluck one of the *struffolli* balls from the base of the precarious arrangement. He rubbed at the back of his neck, growing increasingly anxious. For a moment, he'd almost forgotten why he was there.

“Y’know, I got a rick by the shed. If you need more.”

“I’m sorry?” Hannibal pivoted towards him in one fluid motion, as if his entire body were on a single axis. It was graceful and odd and distinctly Hannibal.

“Wood. Firewood.”

Hannibal smiled broadly, those sharp teeth winking at him again. “How generous of you, Will,” he said, extending a glass.

“I don’t think I really understand this.” Will accepted the glass but kept his gaze on Hannibal’s chest. The towel was gone, along with the apron.

“It isn’t necessary that you do to reap the benefits.”

Will hazarded meeting Hannibal’s gaze and was briefly shaken by it. His features were exceptionally sharp in the firelight, eyes arresting in their steady but affectionate scrutiny. Will felt strangely flayed open.

“I... I don’t know what to do. What should I be doing?”

“Let’s start with the wine.”

Will nodded and took a wavering sip.

The unexpected sweetness overwhelmed his mouth but lighted pleasantly at the back of the tongue. He hadn’t imagined Hannibal serving a wine quite so overtly rich, and he liked it better than the drier varieties he’d grown accustomed to. He wondered if Hannibal would accuse him of flagrant disregard of nuance if he said as much. Too much rotgut dulling his palette to properly appreciate notes of oak and licorice.

A thread of wine trickled down his chin as Will tipped the glass back, and he reflexively reached to dry it with a shirtsleeve. Hannibal caught his wrist and tutted before swabbing away the runoff with a languorous swipe of his thumb, because apparently napkins (and their shirtsleeve kin) were inappropriate stand-ins.

Hannibal cleaned his own thumb with a cursory suck, apparently unperturbed by appearing indecent or unsanitary. Will decided not to mention he was a frequent victim of canine kisses.

“Thanks,” was Will’s devastatingly eloquent repartee. *Idiot.*

He clutched the stem of his glass tighter and took a hasty swig more common to beer than wine, but right now alcohol was alcohol, and Will had never denied being a bit of a lush.

“Are you hungry?” Hannibal asked conversationally, like he didn’t know that Will was absolutely starving. He always saved his appetite for Hannibal.

“Haven’t eaten all day.”

“Will you let me feed you?”

“I’m s-sorry?” Will sputtered, unsure if he’d heard right.

“With my hands. Will you let me feed you?”

“That’s...” Oh, right. This was some kind of weird intimacy exercise. Will sighed and gave a single, decisive nod.

Hannibal cocked his head and raised a brow.

“*Yes*,” Will grated out, not liking how parched he sounded. But as he started for the chair, Hannibal, to Will’s surprise, took it for himself.

Will was flummoxed—until Hannibal patted one of his charcoal thighs.

“Your *lap?*” Will said, aghast.

“Yes,” Hannibal said, “my lap. It will be logistically easier and also encourage concourse. Part of this exercise is to overcome the margins of your proxemics, and,” he added, making an encompassing gesture, “the chair is plenty spacious.”

Will scratched vigorously at his jaw then the back of his head as he weighed his indignation against sheer obstinacy. Then, shoulders squared and not wanting to go back on his word, he slunk over and dropped himself into Hannibal’s prim lap, forcing a soft grunt against the back of his neck as he did so. It wasn’t like Hannibal wouldn’t let him opt out, but Will had a point to prove—and the summit of Mt. Doughtnut to eat.

“Sorry,” Will said, not really all that sorry. Mostly hungry.

Hannibal didn’t immediately move, didn’t immediately do anything. Will suspected he was giving him time to adjust—physically, because he was hardly used to sitting in someone’s damn lap, and mentally, *because he was hardly used to sitting in someone’s damn lap.* Especially his ex-therapist/tacit-murder-consultant’s. He supposed it was par for the course in light of all the taboo topics they discussed on a regular basis, but he was used to conjecture about blood splatter and psychoses.

Not *this*.

Will tensed when hands clasped his shoulders and squeezed. Hannibal’s smoky voice felt like an Icy Hot slapped onto the back of his neck, hair standing on end as damp breath ghosted over his nape. It was a strange, exhilarating sensation. Not exactly pleasant, but acute.

“Do you trust me, Will?”

“Yeah,” Will mumbled, because if he’d come this far, he did. At least a little.

“Good.”

Will watched as a hand moved into his field of vision and towards the plate. Well-formed and dexterous, he marveled at the scripted motion of the wrist and fingers as they worked in unison to pluck an orb of glazed cake from the whole and—

Oh, right.

“It’s all right, Will. Open your mouth.”

Oh god, what had he agreed to?

Will awkwardly worked his jaw open like a rusty hinge, and, easy as he pleased, Hannibal slid the tacky dough right in. Will wasn’t sure why he’d expected a last-minute *just kidding, I can’t believe you went along with that!* Hannibal, of course, had every intention of following through.

Conscientious of his tongue, saliva, and teeth, Will delicately closed his mouth, angled just enough on his perch that he could see Hannibal observing him in his periphery.

For a moment, he forgot his awkward predicament. The doughnut, whatever it was, was outrageously good. Illegally good.

“Ohmh-ai—” Will swallowed. “—God, that’s really good.”

Hannibal hummed against the back of his neck, inadvertently reminding him that he was presently using his host as a chair. “More?”

Will tensed, but said, “Yeah.”

“Manners, Will.”

Will scowled. “Yes, *please*.”

His face felt really, really hot. He was all at once kind of glad Hannibal wasn’t seated across him as they usually were.

The next bite, rid of initial apprehension, was all the better. Moist and almost cloying. Will would have approached the idea a lot more enthusiastically had he known about the struff-whatever. He was receiving his third bite when Hannibal’s thumb deviated and swept down and over his tongue, then across the front of his upper teeth, trailing oil and delicate cream. Will didn’t dare speak or try to close his mouth, wary of his teeth, and Hannibal exploited his caution.

“There are books explicitly devoted to recipes designed to be eaten off the human body. Flavors that pair with the flesh in varying degrees—everyone is unique, of course. A sort of gastronomer’s erotica.”

Will would have laughed if it weren’t for the thumb massaging his mouth, gliding smoothly with the aid of dairy lipids.

“Eating is very sensuous. Taking something into ourselves, inviting it to be a part of us. Changing it so fundamentally and being nourished by that change.”

When Hannibal vacated his mouth to reach for another piece, Will licked his lips and sucked in a breath. “Sounds a little like an act of dominance to me.”

“Perhaps. Those that eat, thrive. To the victor go the spoils.”

“Are you making me stronger? By feeding me? Giving me agency?” Will chuckled, unimpressed.

“Agency over your mind, through pleasure.”

“Pleasure? Is that what this is?”

“Give it a moment.” It was a rasp against the shell of his ear, fingers pressing insistently against his mouth.

Suddenly very intimate.

Will barely suppressed a shudder.

He felt dialed up. Felt like a live wire in an ‘80s thriller skipping across wet pavement and sparking gouts of stop-motion blue. Like too-warm whiskey that’d been forgotten on a window sill, poured over ice.

Not quite similar to the dreams that saw him shooting out of bed to check himself for blood and, when he didn’t find any, scrubbing his body raw in the shower anyways. Not quite similar to the roiling ache in his abdomen when he reconstructed the friction burn of hair tightly twisted between mean fingers, or the heady kick of a pistol. The smell of sulfur and charred flesh close to the muzzle and subsequent silence. Ears ringing, and blood and awful wet—

“Come back to me, Will.”

Will startled at the wet mouth against his ear. A hand threaded through his hair and scrubbed affectionately at his scalp. It felt good. Something pressed at his lips, and he opened. Hannibal didn’t retreat once Will accepted the food, hand lingering to trace greasy fingertips over his bottom lip and to his chin. He felt unclean and wanted to wash his face.

The viscous drag across his skin, tugging at the sensitive hairs of his beard. Orange rind and clever fingers. The smoky perfume of the nearby fire underscored by clean upholstery and warm wood. The absence of any noise or anyone from without, just the lazy tick of a grandfather clock in the corner. Just Hannibal. Just this room.

Will exhaled and relaxed back against Hannibal, who, after plucking Will’s leaning glass from him, dropped a clean hand to Will’s neck, long fingers curling loosely around his throat. “Let me feel you swallow.”

Oh, that was…

He complied, shivering as a plume of moist breath bloomed against his nape and left his skin chilled in its absence.

“The honey,” Hannibal said, demonstrating his tacky fingers, “do you mind?”

Fingers—two at first, then three—brushed his lips expectantly. Will sucked them into his mouth before he could think better of it. Before he could think, *Jesus Christ, what the hell am I even doing?* He was...

Curiously bereft of body tableaux and manic fear. Of any fabricated sensation.

Sweet and warm fingers, curiously calloused in some places, bracketed his curling tongue. He chased the lingering flavor of orange rind and custard. Luxuriated in the unexpectedly intimate experience of foreign autonomy inside his mouth, of this weird reception of sustenance. It was a little like French kissing, he thought. French kissing other parts of Hannibal, not just his mouth. He'd liked his mouth. Maybe he'd like the rest of him too.

"You often observe my hands. Do they arouse you?" Hannibal inquired from beneath the jut of Will's jaw, mouthing at his neck.

Will didn't have a coherent response to that beyond a soft *mph* that might have been a yes, no, or anything in between. Not that he could say much with his mouth full of Hannibal.

"Close your eyes," Hannibal said, finally pulling his fingers free.

Will started.

"Trust me."

Will hesitantly complied, because closing his eyes was the least incriminating thing he'd done insofar. The soft sucking sounds of his mouth seemed even louder with his vision compromised.

"Listen to my voice. Feel my hands. Breathe," Hannibal instructed, loosing another languorous, damp breath against Will's ear and jaw. "Feel my warmth against your back. My heart. It is safe here, with me. Just me."

Will gasped when Hannibal's fingers finally vacated his mouth to roam his shoulders, scalding points of contact between them that scorched his skin through the weathered cotton. He tracked their movement with his mind, narrowing his focus as they squeezed his trapezius, smoothed up and down his biceps. Forward, over his shoulder and firm against a pectoral—

Will flinched and cursed when a thumb caught uncomfortably on one of his stiff nipples.

"You're doing well," came the voice at his ear again, a disembodied presence in his mind now. "Keep your eyes closed."

"I thought the point of this exercise was to calm me," Will bit out, trying to sound less affected than he was.

"I said I could quiet your mind by redirecting your anxiety. I have no intention of quieting your body. You need to decompress."

Will gave a single, quavering laugh. "What do you have in mind?"

“We’ll see. Concentrate.”

“How can I— *ahh* —”

“So sensitive. If you don’t quiet down, I’ll have to find something to occupy your mouth again.”

Will bit down on his lip and exhaled shakily through his nose. He felt strangely overwrought —physically this time. His body was vibrating with the intensity of it, ensconced by Hannibal’s hands and presence—anchored. It was placating, the languid stroking, the absence of obligation, of the necessity to present himself as something more wholesome than the mess he really was.

Hannibal, who felt like a modest fire at his back, warming him through his clothes. His hands continued to lazily comb his body, unobtrusive and expansive, intimidating in their ability to part the seas of Will’s distress and dispel his trepidation. Those hands...

“I want to look,” Will eked out.

“What is it that you want to see?”

“Your... hands. I want to watch them.”

“You may.”

He did, and was immediately crushed with the desire to grab them. To feel the long, fine bones and veins that textured the back of them, to trace the manicured nails, explore the delicate fold of skin between the well-formed fingers—and when voyeurism didn’t cut it, Will brought Hannibal’s hand back to his mouth and sealed his lips around the ring and middle finger, making an exhibition of it. His initiative earned him a stunted gasp, from Hannibal this time, and oh, that did things to Will.

Hannibal had been telling the truth when he’d said it was to be a mutual exchange. Will was sure of that now.

“Will,” Hannibal warned.

The fingers in his mouth were clean but still faintly sweet, the hand on his thigh—when had that gotten there?— digging deep into lax muscle. He shifted his hips, readjusting himself, and Hannibal sucked in a sharp breath.

Will immediately realized why. He paused in a moment of deliberation; then, instead of acknowledging Hannibal’s burgeoning problem, he said, “Touch me.”

“*I am,*” Hannibal hissed, and there was something satisfying about Hannibal’s control slipping, even that little bit.

“No, *touch me.*” Will forced the hand on his thigh to the front of his pants.

He wasn't there yet, but he was well on his way. Will was a little surprised he was able to get it up at all without at least two drinks and some unwarranted empathy. Without the aid of some vicarious pleasure, without thinking of the Ripper, the bodies—

No. He felt genuinely good, and it had nothing to do with any of that. It was his own pleasure, his. Real.

Hannibal's hand remained immobile, as if it's relocation was incidental.

"C'mon," Will urged, "not gonna freak out, just— *ahh, yeah.*"

God, those hands were good. They *looked* good, deftly popping open his fly like they'd done it a thousand times. Will watched, rapt, as those articulate fingers shoved inside and over the top of his exposed underwear. Hannibal got his first handful, and Will threw his head back against his shoulder, hips jerking.

"They do, I love them," Will said, stream of conscious, as he watched the front of his trousers distend over Hannibal's knuckles.

"Hmm?"

"Your—*ah, fuck*—your hands. Keep doing that."

"I know. Admittedly, I hadn't imagined quite to this extent or in this way."

"Yeah, me either. Wait—oh. They're so warm."

"Will, what do you want. I want to give you what you want."

"I—" He was content with what was going on already, but if Hannibal was offering... "Can we have sex?" He'd failed to ask the first time. It still sounded a lot more risque aloud than he'd anticipated, too forward, so he quickly added: "Too fast? I don't—do this."

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have—"

"Yes, I am amenable to sex, Will. If that is what you want."

Will pitched forward a little and moaned. Oh god, this was really getting out of hand. *In hand*, he amended.

"Have you been with a man before?"

"Once. But not—I'll be fine. I want you." Did he? And if he did, would Hannibal actually—oh, god. Oh-god-oh-god—"*Please, Hannibal.*"

Hannibal made a sound like Will had just stuck a shiv in him, then softly said, "You surprise me, Will."

He was out of his depth, so he went for broke—angled his head and licked across the swell of Hannibal's lips, soliciting entrance. And was immediately granted it: deep, cheek-hollowing kisses that made his jaw ache as he rocked into Hannibal's squeezing palm and back against his increasingly solid perch.

"Starting to," Will said, breaking for breath, "realize why you said I might want to shower."

"I thought you might feel consoled by the fact if things did indeed progress."

"To this?"

"No. I'd planned—" Will felt Hannibal tremor. "I'd planned an edible arrangement, of sorts. Another time."

"Not sex, you mean."

"I hadn't expected—"

"Castle Lecter have any bedrooms?"

"Several."

"Just need yours."

"Of course. Please—"

Hannibal urged him off of his lap, and once they were (carefully) disentangled, Will immediately found himself looking down at him. One leg of the good doctor's pressed slacks —now quite rumpled—was stretched taut over a large erection, a dark patch of moisture obvious in the charcoal wool.

Will had done that to Hannibal. Hannibal wanted *him*. Looked completely debauched by his want of him. God, maybe Hannibal was the one with the neuroses if Will was what did it for him. He was aware of Hannibal surveying Will's state in turn as he gawked. Hannibal looked parched, adam's apple bobbing as he swallowed. It was the single most erotic thing Will had witnessed in years. Not the gesture, but the unfettered, tumultuous need behind it. Hannibal looked ravenous. Something in his eyes struck Will, like that strange smile, but he dismissed it.

"I didn't intend for this," Hannibal assured him, rolling his red, red lips together and peering plaintively up at Will through displaced tufts of tawny silver, as if appealing to a saint that could forgive him some egregious sin.

"You're lying." Will pulled him up by the front of his shirt. "You're getting exactly what you want. And so am I. Not gonna back out now, are you?"

"I don't think so."Hannibal abruptly turned him by his shoulder, gripping the back of Will's neck with a steely hand. Something nameless frizzled along his nerves. Something familiar. An insidious neuralgia germinating in the dark. "We're not finished."

“Fuck, show me.*”* Will felt lightheaded.

“Say it.” Hannibal squeezed his neck and guided Will back against him with a firm palm against his abdomen.

“K-Kinky bastard.” Will rasped a laugh. “I knew it.”

“*Will.”*

“I... I want you. Want you to smell me in your bed, your house. Everywhere.”

“Oh,” Hannibal remarked, a latent intake of breath belying his clinical tone.

“And when you see me at work, in therapy, you’ll remember how I taste, how good it felt, how—”

Hannibal snarled and gave him a gentle shove, guiding him out of the study and, Will assumed, to the aforementioned bedroom.

Hannibal’s bedroom was a gaping maw that swallowed Will up, down into the belly that was the California king sleigh bed at its center with African blackwood at its head and foot. The duvet was lost to the void of the floor along with their clothes as they twisted together, a legion of fevered limbs in stormy satin.

When they broke apart to breathe, Will turned over onto his stomach and let Hannibal rock against his body, foreshadowing what was to come.

“Two make-out sessions and now you just gotta,” Will said, panting, “have it all, huh?” He craned his head so that Hannibal’s pillow didn’t *completely* muffle him.

“Oh, Will.” Hannibal kept a hand splayed between Will’s shoulders, not forcing him down but keeping him steady. Reminding Will of exactly what it was he was offering. “This is only a fraction of what I would have of you.”

“More?” A single, strangled laugh. “Sounds like you wanna swallow me whole. Eat me u—unh.” Hannibal started to breach him. *“Fuck.”*

“Is it—”

“Don’t stop. I need it. I need how much you want this. Want everything.” Will, demonstrating trust and impatience in equal measure, relaxed and started to bear back on Hannibal’s cock. “C’mon, I want you... I can’t stand it.” Will swallowed and gripped the sheets in white-knuckled fists. “Just... *fucking-give-it-to-me-already.*”

Then Hannibal started to move in earnest. Will cried out as they snapped together, teeth-chattering thrusts that sent Will forward on his knees. He gripped the headboard and let his head hang between his sore shoulders as he was obliged. The dark wooden posts cracked against the plasterboard as Hannibal rode him, choking back clipped grunts of exertion. It might have sounded more like violence, had Will's own unabashed cries not made it into the mix. Deep, throaty moans and reedy little sighs punched into a staccato by Hannibal's vigorous pace. Pleas of encouragement, *yeah, like that, oh*. The enthusiastic clap of bodies. Bewildered, stream-of-conscious compliments, *so good, you're so good,* and Hannibal's name, over and over. Will couldn't stop saying his name, making up for all the times he'd needled Hannibal with a sardonic *Doctor*.

He was glad Hannibal had spent for-fucking-ever massaging him open now that he was finally getting fucked. He felt too full. Too full for anything or anyone else. It was a strangely comforting thought. Body full, head empty.

Will had never had this before. Not his own pleasure, his and Hannibal's now, to glut himself on in equal measure. This dark, insular, secret place—raw and honest, like his seat across from Hannibal's at his table. A springboard for his elusive ego. An epicurean alcove of the world in which Will was safe to raise the bulkheads of his heart and mind, to finally unfurl—purge everything, everyone else's shit, and make room for himself. To find and know himself. To feel good because because he was choosing to. Wanted to.

Thought I'd forgotten how. Who. Hannibal's giving this to me. He's—

Will's heart ached. His body ached. A bittersweet, marrow-deep ache that was all his, all cloistered for too long. He was going to drown in it.

Hannibal pulled out with a hiss, hitched Will's hips up, and pushed back in. The new angle made his body convulse with a strange sort of pleasure. He didn't know if he had to piss or wanted to come. He quickly sided with the latter after a few more firm strokes. Will opened his eyes and was greeted with the sight of his own cock bouncing to the rhythm of Hannibal's thrusts, swollen fat and an angry red. Another copious thread of fluid drooled onto the rumpled sheets beneath. In the dim light, he could make out the shadow of Hannibal's thighs behind his own, quivering and slick with sweat. It was obscene.

Arms encircled his waist as Hannibal bent over him, the hair on his chest scratching at Will's back.

Then he felt it. The mounting pressure in his gut, like a compressed spring about to release, and—

"Hannibal, I—"

"Let go, Will."

"Oh—" He was right there. Right on the edge, and all he'd done was take Hannibal's cock. He pried one of his hands off the headboard to reach between his legs, but Hannibal beat him to it. The minute Hannibal's hand encircled him, he started to come in thick pulses over his

fingers and onto the bed. The tight clench of climax while Hannibal still rocked into him was almost too much.

“W-Will, do you want me to—”

“No, do it inside.” Hannibal bucked against him, hard, right on target. “Fuck—*Hannibal*—”

“*Will*—”

Hannibal arched sharply over him and made a disbelieving kind of snarl that Will barely heard through the white hiss between his ears. There was a tell-tale throb where they connected, deep in his belly, as Hannibal yanked Will’s hips back and bottomed out. Then came inside him.

For a while they remained still, breathing. Hard breaths that dwindled into little tremulous sighs as exhaustion set in. Then Will said, “Thought I’d feel dirty after,” and sagged, wanting to drop onto the bed but mindful of the mess beneath him.

Hannibal made a noncommittal sound of admonishment and reluctantly slipped free so that he could tie the condom off and toss it into the trash bin by the end table. Will leisurely watched, too exhausted to move.

“You didn’t have to use a condom.”

“Do you really think that would have been such a good idea?”

“I’m clean. And I trust you. I don’t want you to use one, next time.”

“Hmm.” Hannibal pulled Will back against him and nose at his nape. Will felt boneless and was impressed that Hannibal had the strength to maneuver them.

“How,” Hannibal said, mouthing at Will’s neck between his words, “do you feel?”

“I don’t... feel anything.” Will craned his head to look at the ceiling, Hannibal’s silvery hair rimed by amber lamplight in his periphery. “It’s quiet.” A thoughtful pause. “It’s wonderful.”

Hannibal made an unintelligible sound, smoothing a broad palm down Will’s arm and placing lazy kisses on his neck and shoulder. “I’ll run you a bath.”

“Just me?”

“What would you prefer?”

“I’ve seen that football stadium you call a tub,” Will groused. Then, in a moment of tender sincerity: “Don’t leave. Not yet.”

“All right. I’ll find you a change of clothes after.”

“No paisley.”

Hannibal hummed, only halfheartedly considering the demand. “I’ll do my best.”

Several days passed before Will finally called and told him, with a degree of urgency, that he couldn’t wait. Hannibal had smiled to himself and told Will that he was up for company that night.

Will was there within the hour, and Hannibal let him come apart in his arms, all blood and breath, hard fingers and beating heart.

Will had, Hannibal thought with no small amount of pride, acquired a taste for him.

“I never thought about you like this—not at first,” Will told him as they lay together on Hannibal’s bed, undressed and frequently kissing.

“And now?”

“I can barely think at all. When you’re in the same room. God, it feels like everyone knows.”

“What do you think about?”

“You.”

“How?”

“Everywhere. Every way. Under me, on me.” Will’s throat clicked as he swallowed. *“*There was a conference today, and I—fuck, Hannibal, *during the conference*. I had to put my jacket in my lap.*”*

“What about now?”

“I—”

Will looked between them, lips parted and jaw working from side to side in a parody of grinding his teeth. His eyes were lidded and glazed with lust as he watched Hannibal’s big hand slip between his thighs and start to squeeze.

“You love my hands,” Hannibal said, rumbling when Will’s legs responsively parted.

“...Feels good.”

“It can feel even better.”

“Mmmh.” Will pushed into his palm and grit his teeth. “Yeah?” Will licked his lips, looking down the long lines of Hannibal’s body as Hannibal crouched above him. “Turn over for me, baby.”

Hannibal quirked a brow, but Will was already slithering out from under him, either oblivious or indifferent to his slip of the tongue. Hannibal thought he could pick out his accent, a little stronger when Will was angry, drunk, aroused, or any amalgam of the three, as he'd said it.

Perhaps he'd ask about it later.

Hannibal rolled over onto his stomach and supplicated himself by drawing up a knee in invitation, aware that Will—even if the man had yet to acknowledge it for himself—savored Hannibal, the beast, yielding to him. Will was a handler of beasts, after all. Instructing Hannibal when he wanted something came naturally to him.

Either, undomesticated and consoled by the other's savagery, that roiling wild just beneath the surface.

Will didn't know, not fully. Not yet.

"*Show me*," Hannibal told him.

The appreciative moan behind him was unmistakable as Will bracketed him with his arms and laid his body down along Hannibal's, a hot stripe of heat from head to hips. A few minutes of languorous oscillation.

It was enough, for now. To have Will this way, to give himself to Will in turn. Until it was time. Until he could throw back the veil, his and Will's both, and know the world and one another. They would be free, belonging only to each other.

Hannibal realized then that he was never going to let him go. Only death could take Will from him, and even then he would fight.

Will belonged to him.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

A minimalist approach doesn't mean mediocre.

Chapter Notes

Just a nugget I wanted to append after a bout of nostalgia.

“Minimalist,” Will repeats, dubious.

“Yes.” Hannibal presents the corked bottle of artisanal olive oil for inspection. Flecks of gold suspended in the oil flash as they refract firelight. “A treasure from the Greek island of Mykonos.”

“Ah,” he says, raising his eyebrows. *There it is.* “Not so minimal.”

“One medium,” Hannibal clarifies. “Cost is irrelevant.”

“One?” Will begins unbuttoning the front of his dress shirt, earning him a slight adjustment of Hannibal’s cool stare. “Or two?”

Hannibal’s only concession is the slight pursing of lips; then he’s intercepting Will’s slow work and telling him to “Leave it on. Like this,” pulling the shirt over one shoulder so that Will is in a state of undress, neither here nor there.

Will does as he’s told and allows Hannibal to guide him backwards until his calves collide with something solid. He falls, landing in the center of a camelback sofa: tufted, ash blue, and opulent enough to make Will feel like a human stain.

His empathy paints another picture.

Will sees Hannibal’s premeditation: the carefully curated palette from his cream shirt, chocolate slacks, and pink shoulder against the tired blue of the sofa—a lavish cake in a baker’s display; the curtains parted just so on the window adjacent, repurposing the gloomy, overcast sun for fill lighting, and juxtaposing the warm backlight of the fireplace that cuts a quivering outline out of his slouched body.

It’s all a bit too floral for Will, but the way Hannibal’s looking at him—like he wants to see behind his flesh and inside, cutting open the cake to a red velvet surprise—is more his speed.

Shouldn’t be, but his face feels hot all the same.

“What do you see,” Will asks anyways, words sticking to the back of his throat.

“Sex,” Hannibal says with such frank sincerity that Will has to look away and remember to breathe. For all that he enjoys their dirty secret, he’s never prepared to hear it voiced aloud, given agency outside the alcove in his mind and Hannibal’s home. It’s jarring.

Will opens his legs a little in the guise of relaxing.

Hannibal responds by uncorking the oil with a ceremonial pop and thumbs the lip of the bottle, smoothing the velvety liquid between long fingers. “Shall I reiterate the rules?”

“N-No.” Will doesn’t need reminding. Of the rules or the competency of those fingers. “I think—”

“I remain dressed, and you may not masturbate yourself,” Hannibal says so seriously that Will should laugh, but abject embarrassment ties his tongue. “Only—”

“*Hands free* ,” he says quickly, before he sinks completely through the sofa and into the second ring of hell. “Just don’t be disappointed if I… *can’t.* ”

“You will.” Hannibal’s tone implies no uncertainty. “My position as a practiced doctor of medicine and philosophy affords me a wealth of knowledge in the anatomy of the body and the mind.” Hannibal dons a polite, almost sanitary smile (offensively incongruous with the topic at hand) as he extends his middle and ring fingers in a gesture Will presumes benign; until they curl, just so, as if pressing a button. “I’ll have every inch of you, in every capacity, obedient on my fingers.”

Will instinctively covers the front of his pants as a red-hot coal of shame settles in his gut and *burns.*

Hannibal takes him apart in stages. The pour, the bake, the glaze.

Red lips, gliding liberally over his chest; shirt translucent with oil where it hangs from a shoulder. Expert fingers, like he’s watched master the ivories of the harpsichord—God, those hands, on and *inside*--making music where there was none. Looking like the cat with canary as he covers his mouth, but not stopping, when someone knocks at the front door.

Doing something like this, getting accustomed to it, with someone involved in the investigations could be a liability. He shouldn’t, but he does.

The thought comes to him easily and with unexpected immediacy: *Imagine if Hannibal were the Ripper.*

Will laughs, but the notion leaves him with resistance, a ghost of something left in its absence.

End Notes

Sometimes I art too. Visit me over on tumblr and leave some dad jokes in my ask or something.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!